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REVUE D'HISTOIRE GLOBALE DES PAYS DU NORD

Qu'est-ce que l'Europe du Nord ?

Départements d'études néerlandaises et scandinaves – Université de Strasbourg

PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DE STRASBOURG

N° 10

DESHiMA

REVUE D'HISTOIRE GLOBALE DES PAYS DU NORD

DESHiMA, fondée par Thomas Beaufils, est une revue thématique annuelle publiant des études consacrées à l'histoire globale des pays du Nord. Le Nord étant considéré dans son sens le plus large, incluant essentiellement les pays ayant une ouverture maritime vers la mer de la Baltique, la mer du Nord, la mer du Groenland et la mer de Barents. Suite aux processus de colonisation et à la dynamique des voyages et explorations, la géographie culturelle du Nord dessine une carte qui s'étend à une échelle européenne et même mondiale – Afrique du Sud, Surinam, Indonésie, Antilles néerlandaises, Congo, Japon, Amérique du Nord…

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Deshima était une petite île artificielle dans la baie de Nagasaki au Japon. La Compagnie des Indes Orientales (voc) a eu l'autorisation de s'y installer dès 1641 pour y faire du commerce avec les Japonais. La voc engageait à bord de ses navires non seulement des Néerlandais mais aussi des marins et des explorateurs de toute l'Europe du Nord. Le nom de cette revue a été choisi afin de présenter la diversité et l'originalité de l'histoire globale des pays du Nord.

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N'hésitez pas à nous faire part de vos remarques, critiques et suggestions. Pour soumettre un article, merci de contacter la rédaction.

Correspondance rédactionnelle
Thomas Mohnike
Université de Strasbourg
Département d'Études Scandinaves
22 rue René Descartes
BP 80010 – FR-67084 Strasbourg Cedex
tmohnike@unistra.fr
pus.unistra.fr/revues/deshima

Éditeur
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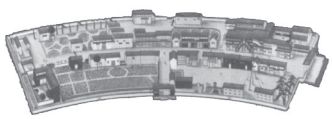

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"Scandimania" and the Victorians: Exoticism or Self-identification?

Claire McKeown

In recent years, Scandinavian culture has gained tremendous popularity in Britain. The already well–established British adoption of Scandinavian fashion and interiors has been reinforced by a greater interest in other aspects of Nordic life, and especially literature, cinema and television. The wave of "Nordic noir" series and novels is a notable example of this, with books by Jo Nesbø and Stieg Larsson selling well, and series like *The Killing* and *The Bridge* airing at peak time on British television. These macabre fictional depictions of the Nordic countries provide a counter-point to the glittering political example of the Nordic model.

The title of this paper refers to a documentary series presented by Hugh Fearnley–Whittingstall in 2014[1], and a neologism which has appeared more generally in recent media coverage of both popular Scandinavian cultural imports and political matters[2]. Through examples from literary and cultural texts from the 19th Century, I will suggest

[1] *Scandimania*, Channel 4, 2-16 February 2014.

[2] For example: Thomas, Rebecca, "Scandimania—the Nordic fashion boom", 2/11/15, *The Mancunion*; Turnbull, Tony, "Scandi-mania! The food: More than just meatballs", *The Times*, 13/06/15; Booth, Michael, "Stop the Scandimania: Nordic nations aren't the utopias they're made out to be", *Washington Post*, 16/01/15; Seager, Charlotte, "Scandimania: 'Stipsters', digital innovation and now, social business", *The Guardian,* 12/03/14.

that this modern phenomenon had a Victorian precedent which shared many of the same cultural preoccupations, as well as a dual perception of Nordic culture: exotic yet familiar, modern yet rustic[3].

The recent Nordic mood in the UK has led to a large number of books on the subject, celebrating the Scandinavian lifestyle either in general or through specific aspects of society and culture. Many of these combine humour and popular cultural references with reflections on societal and political issues. Many are written with a tone of admiration (albeit sometimes tongue-in-cheek, as the titles indicate), and refer to studies citing the Nordic countries as the happiest, and most equal, in the world.[4]

Another aspect of "Scandimania" is the parallel which is often drawn in the media between the Scandinavian countries and Britain, and highlighted through common cultural references. During the campaign for Scottish independence, many references were made to a link between an independent Scotland and Scandinavia, seeking both potential collaboration and political or social comparisons[5]. These came from Scottish National Party leaders, but were also reciprocated by Scandinavian cultural figures: a letter of support for independence from well-known writers, such as Jon Fosse and Jostein Gaarder, appeared in The Herald several months before the referendum[6].

---

[3] I will refer to the current and 19th Century British treatment of the Nordic countries as a whole, but many of the sources deal specifically with Norway. As Fjågesund and Syme demonstrate in *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2003), Norway had a particularly strong reputation in the UK, not only for modern and ancient culture, but also as an exciting holiday destination.

[4] Examples include: Patrick Kingsley, *How to Be Danish* (Short Books Ltd., 2012), Helen Russell, *The Year of Living Danishly* (Icon Books Ltd, 2015), Kajsa Kinsella, *Nordicana* (Cassell, 2015), as well as the flipside provided by Michael Booth in *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* (Jonathan Cape, 2014). Specific topics have also been covered individually, such as food in *Scandilicious* by Signe Johansen (Hodder and Stoughton, 2011), and crime fiction in *Nordic Noir* by Barry Forshaw (Oldcastle books, 2013).

[5] Hilson, Mary and Newby, Andrew G., "The Nordic Welfare Model in Norway and Scotland", in Bryden, John, Brox, Ottar, Riddoch, Lesley (eds), *Northern Neighbours: Scotland and Norway since 1800*, Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

[6] "Scandinavian writers pen love letter to independent Scotland", *The Herald*, 23rd March 2014. Retrieved form http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13151892.Scandinavian_writers_pen_love_letter_to_independent_Scotland/

At times these comparisons were more specifically linked with the aspects of Scandinavian popular culture which have become part of British culture. For example, the series *Borgen* brought not only a greater interest in Danish political structures, but also an entertaining picture of coalition politics while Britain's first coalition government since the Second World War was in power. The televised debates in the run-up to the 2015 general election were compared with those portrayed in the series[7], and on the day of the election the creator of the series provided his political commentary in an article in the Guardian[8]. Again, specific connections were also made with Scottish politics, particularly as a result of Nicola Sturgeon's contribution to the debate, which was compared with the protagonist's success in the opening episode. This link was even encouraged by Sturgeon herself, who interviewed the actress Sidse Babett Knudsen for Scottish television.

Other parallels are of a broader, or more instinctive, nature and generally based on the climate and habits associated with these countries. An example of this is provided by Laura Collins in the *New Yorker*:

> Britain and Denmark have in common seafaring, drinking, and execrable weather. To Brits, Danes are exotic, but, as one Dane told me recently, "not, like, Hawaii-pineapple exotic." Brits can relate to Danes, while finding them novel.[9]

Denmark and Britain have several common features, but are sufficiently different for Denmark to maintain its foreignness. While the same comparison could justifiably be made with a number of other Northern European countries, including Ireland, Holland and even Northern France, it appears particularly fitting between Denmark and Britain. This sense of proximity is encouraged by popular culture, which provides shared references and concrete points of comparison.

[7] Frost, Vicky, "Tonight's election debate and the Borgenisation of British politics", *The Guardian*, 2nd April 2015. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/02/leaders-debates-borgenisation-british-politics

[8] Price, Adam, "A slice of cake for all: the Borgen guide to lasting coalitions", *The Guardian*, 7th May 2015. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/07/borgen-guide-lasting-coalitions-anish-insight-uk-government

[9] Collins, Laura. "Danish Postmodern". *The New Yorker* 2013. Retrieved from www.newyorker.com 31 May 2016.

However, another aspect of the British proximity with Scandinavia is surely derived from a sense of shared history, since the Viking invasions have an important role in (imagined) British identity. The literary fascination with their part in British history reached a peak during the Victorian period. While literary interest in Vikings and the sagas could be said to start in the 17th century, it reached a climax in the 19th century, with numerous translations of Norse texts, such as *Frithiof's Saga* (the first full translation of a saga, by George Stephens in 1839) and *Heimskringla* (selected excerpts relevant to British, and specifically Scottish, history had already been translated by James Johnstone in the late 18th century, but Samuel Laing provided a complete version in 1844)[10]. Many writers contributed to this wave of interest in Old Norse, through translation, but also through rewritings of the sagas, or simply stories inspired by them. H. Rider Haggard created a Viking tale of his own in *Eric Brighteyes* (1890). William Morris did the same in *The House of the Wolfings* (1889), but also translated *The Volsunga Saga* in his epic poem *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (1876). The latter text, and Morris's writing in general, was to influence British fantasy literature considerably through JRR Tolkien, who shared Morris's enthusiasm for Nordic legends[11].

This renewed interest in ancient texts was associated not only with the rich literary potential of the Old North, but for some also with a sense of its historical importance for British readers. For example, in his introduction to Morris's translation of *The Volsunga Saga*, H Halliday Sparling admires the Icelandic ability to retain a link with the past:

> In England, Germany, and the rest of Europe, what is left of the traditions of pagan times has been altered in a thousand ways by foreign influence, even as the peoples and their speech have been by the influx of foreign blood; but Iceland held to the old tongue that was once the universal speech of northern folk, and held also the great stores of tale and poem that are slowly becoming once more the common heritage of their descendants. The truth, care, and literary beauty of its records; the varied and strong life shown alike in tale and history; and the preservation of the old speech, character, and tradition—a people

[10] France, Peter, *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 554.

[11] Tolkien has cited Morris's influence, for example in his letters: *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter. London, George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

> placed apart as the Icelanders have been—combine to make valuable what Iceland holds for us.[12]

Sparling differentiates between the more central European countries, which have lost the sense of their older traditions, and geographically distant Iceland, where cultural traditions and even older language traits are maintained. This appears to be an example of a commonly cited principle in linguistics that peripheral zones are prone to conservatism, and keep older language traits after they have disappeared from central areas.[13] Iceland's distance from the rest of Europe has prevented external influences from diluting its cultural heritage. Sparling underlines the "common" aspects of this history for inhabitants of the Northern countries, and by including himself and the reader in its "universal" value, clearly sees Britain as part of this historical North.

Frederick Metcalfe expresses a similar idea in *The Englishman and the Scandinavian*, specifically drawing attention to the influence of Norse on the English language: "Without a knowledge of the Northern literature nobody can be thoroughly furnished for the study of our mother tongue."[14]

The old Northern language and literature is also attached to a powerful set of images. Metcalfe also alludes to this richness, referring to the "impetuous, sparkling" roots of English in the "mountains of the far North"[15]. Here exoticism and philology are combined, and while the North remains distant, some of its romantic qualities appear to trickle down into the English language. Similarly, in the novel *Erling the Bold* RM Ballantyne emphasises the contemporary value of the history Scandinavia and Britain share:

> Yes, there is perhaps more of Norse blood in your veins than you wot of, reader, whether you be English or Scotch, for those sturdy sea-rovers invaded our lands from north, south, east, and west many a time in days gone by, and held it in possession for centuries at a time, leaving a lasting and beneficial impress on our customs and characters. We have

[12] "Introduction" by Sparling, H Halliday, in Morris, William, *The Volsunga Saga Translated From the Icelandic*, London, Norrœna society, 1907, p. 2.
[13] E.g. Manczak, Witold, "Bartoli's second 'norm'", in Fislak, Jacek (ed.) *Historical Dialectology: Regional and Social*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1988, p. 349-356.
[14] Metcalfe, Frederick, *The Englishman and the Scandinavian*, London, Trübner & co., p. 486.
[15] *Ibid*.

> good reason to regard their memory with respect and gratitude, despite their faults and sins, for much of what is good and true in our laws and social customs, much of what is manly and vigorous in the British Constitution, and much of our intense love of freedom and fair-play, is due to the pith, pluck, enterprise, and sense of justice that dwelt in the breasts of the rugged old Sea-kings of Norway![16]

Ballantyne reminds the reader of the effect Viking invasions had on Britain, painting these as a predominantly positive influence. This produces a romanticised vision of both contemporary British society, with its culture of "fair-play", and the "rugged", "sturdy" invaders. Viking heritage here is a source of pride, and an undoubtedly appealing masculine image in an adventure story for young Victorian boys. Ballantyne presents an idealised version of the invaders, motivated by a "sense of justice". This projection of desired characteristics onto the Viking characters reflects the "wide variety of constructions of Vikingism" [17] observed by Wawn in Victorian texts.

On a more pragmatic level, Ballantyne also reinforces the link between the Scandinavian languages and English, noting the ease of travel for English speakers:

> However, it is curious to observe how very small an amount of Norse will suffice for ordinary travellers—especially for Scotchmen. The Danish language is the vernacular tongue of Norway and there is a strong affinity between Danish (or Norse) and broad Scotch. Roughly speaking I should say that a mixture of three words of Norse to two of broad Scotch, with a powerful emphasis and a strong infusion of impudence, will carry you from the Naze to the North Cape in perfect comfort.[18]

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[16] Ballantyne, Robert Michael, *Erling the Bold: A Tale of the Norse Sea-Kings*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1871, p. 437.

[17] Wawn, Andrew, *The Vikings and the Victorians*: *Inventing the Old North in 19th Century Britain*, Suffolk, Boydell and Brewer, 2002, p. 4. "…old northmen are variously buccaneering, triumphalist, defiant, confused, disillusioned, unbiddable, disciplined, elaborately pagan, austerely pious, relentlessly jolly, or self-destructively sybaritic. They are merchant adventurers, mercenary soldiers, pioneering colonists, pitiless raiders, self-sufficient farmers, cutting-edge naval technologists, primitive democrats, psychopathic berserks, ardent lovers and complicated poets."

[18] Ballantyne, Robert Michael, *Personal Reminiscences in Book Making and Some Short Stories* (1893), retrieved from http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21755/21755-h/21755-h.htm.

Not only are Britain and Scandinavia bound by history and literature, intercommunication is a practical, contemporary reality. Amusingly, Ballantyne finds Scottish dialects even closer to the Norwegian language than standard English, allowing Scottish travellers to communicate with particular ease. The northernmost parts of Britain are more readily compared with the Nordic countries, and the ethnologist Robert Gordon Latham observes a similar distance between London and Scotland as that between England and Norway:

> The civilisation of Norway differs from that of England, as that of Inverness differs from that of London; not as the stages of culture in Isfahan and Paris differ from each other. It is a difference in degree, not of kind. The two countries are on different steps of the same ladder.

Latham underlines the relatively low "degree" of separation between Britain and Scandinavia by comparing it with the difference between more distant nations. Rather than mixing cultural similarity with the exoticism of Nordic history and landscape, Latham advocates a sort of anti-Orientalism, where the North is not so much an Other as a foreign cousin.[19]

However, the hierarchical image of a ladder may bring Britain and Norway closer together, but it reinforces the distance between peripheral and more connected areas. Norway and Scotland are both further from the cultural centre of London, and therefore have other features in common, such as more rural settings. Indeed, specific comparisons between Norwegian and Scottish landscapes indicate these differences of degree rather than character. George Dasent's introduction to his translation of *Popular Tales from the Norse* (originally by Asbjørnsen and Moe) also indicates that the two countries' landscapes are comparable: "The West Coast of Scotland is something like that nature in a general way, except that it is infinitely smaller and less grand…"[20] This comparison underlines an aspect of the dual vision of the Nordic countries: while Norway's landscapes are singularly impressive, they

[19] Briens uses the term "borealism" to discuss the specific way in which the South views the North, as a space "sans épaisseur culturelle", defined by "l'absence de sons, de couleur, de chaleur, de personnes…" and onto which "on peut projeter ce que l'on veut". Briens, Sylvain, "Boréalisme. Le nord comme espace discursif", in *Etudes Germaniques*, 71, Paris, Klincksieck, 2016, (forthcoming).

[20] Dasent, George Webbe, *Popular Tales From the* Norse, Edinburgh, David Douglas, 1903, p. cI.

may appear somewhat less foreign to a visitor who is familiar with the more dramatic parts of the British Isles. However, Norway remains a unique experience, and a unique social context, with features that can be found in "no other land"[21]:

> …those many tones and notes of Nature's voice making distant music through the twilight summer night, those brilliant, flashing, northern lights when days grow short, those dazzling, blinding storms of autumn snow… a country where there are neither lords nor ladies, but simple men and women, brave men and fair women, who cling to the traditions of their forefathers, and whose memory reflects as from the faithful mirror of their native steel the whole history and progress of their race…[22]

The emblematic northern lights and snowy winters take on an almost sublime atmosphere in Dasent's introduction. Alongside these romantic scenes and the country's attachment to history there are also suggestions of modernity. While evoking images of simple rural life, Dasent also gives a hint that Norway has a different social structure, and perhaps a less rigid class system. Fjågesund and Syme indicate that in "progressive quarters" of Britain, Norwegian social and political structures were seen as commendable, particularly thanks to the greater possibility for the *bønder* classes, owners of small farms, to succeed financially and be represented in politics.[23]

While the Scandinavian countries were an exotic, and for some travellers exemplary, place to visit in the 19th century, Fjågesund and Syme also note the parallel interest in travelling to Britain's "Celtic periphery"[24]. This may have had an almost equivalent role in tourism as the recreational study of cultural history: "…here the British—or most often the English—increasingly saw themselves as different from and superior to this Celtic stock."[25]

Just as an English tourist might visit Scandinavia to find a greater link with tradition, and a simpler, rural lifestyle, other parts of the British Isles also provided a glimpse at history. However, the closer

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[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.*, p. cli.
[23] Fjågesund, Peter and Syme, Ruth A., *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the Nineteenth Century*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2003, p. 184-185.
[24] *Ibid.* p. 119.
[25] *Ibid.*

Celtic countries were more palatable as a point of comparison than as proof of any glamorous heritage.

A sense of cultural distinction may also have been part of the appeal of the Northern countries conveyed through the critic Edmund Gosse's writing. One reviewer enjoyed his account of his travels in Denmark because it evokes the country's unique features:

> Before very long the entire world will be so brought together by facilities of intercommunication that there will be no indigenous and native culture, cut off and differentiated from the general culture of the world. It is as a record of such a culture and such a community that this charming volume of reminiscences justifies itself and delights the reader.[26]

Here the literary attractiveness of Denmark is based on its differences from Britain, and with a sense that it is peripheral, and less influenced by modernity or wider trends. As with the appeal of dramatic Norwegian landscapes for tourists, Victorian readers were also interested in the cultural differences observed in geographically closer Denmark. Gosse's account describes interesting aspects of Danish social life, such as Danes' tone of "tenderness, rather than awe"[27] when referring to their royal family, as well as local landscapes. While they are not "sublime" or "grandiose", Gosse is attracted by their "characteristic elegance", made up of "modulated horizons" and "delicate waters".[28] Denmark may be less visually dramatic, but it is sufficiently different to attract interest.

Gosse's fascination with Scandinavia was not only motivated by the discovery of "native culture", but also by the desire to bring new angles and approaches to modern British literature. He forged links with a number of Scandinavian writers, and learned to read Norwegian. One of the writers who interested him was Ibsen, the most famous Norwegian writer and a key cultural figure in Britain at the end of the 19th century. Gosse devoted various texts to Ibsen, as well as exchanging letters with him. In an 1873 article he paints a colourful picture of Norway, which echoes Dasent's romantic portrayal of the country, but places Ibsen in contrast with his environment:

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[26] *The North American Review*, 196(682), 424-425. (1912). Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/25119846

[27] Gosse Edmund, *Two Visits to Denmark 1872, 1874*, London, Smith, Elder, 1911, 36.

[28] *Ibid.*. 17.

> A land of dark forests, gloomy waters, barren peaks, inundated by cold sharp airs as off Arctic icebergs. A land where Nature must be won with violence, not wooed by the siren-songs of dream-impulses, Norway is the home of vigorous, ruddy lads and modest maidens, a healthy population, unexhausted and unrestrained.[29]

The people of Norway are painted as exemplifying rural simplicity, and the countryside corresponds to the visually impressive images which attracted Victorian tourists, and continue to attract many tourists today. However, Ibsen himself is at odds with this wholesome picture of his country, being a "typical modern European, a soul full of doubt and sorrow and unfulfilled desire"[30].

Ibsen was a significant example of modernity in Britain at the end of the 19th century, and the effect of his plays on avant-garde literature could be seen to as similar to that of Scandinavian noir on British television. Ibsen's role during the 1890s may even have been a high-brow form of Scandimania, and certainly generated a number of neologisms. Some of these were negative, and suspicious of Ibsen's agenda; for example reviews of Robert Williams Buchanan's *The Gifted Lady* refer to this play as a "skit on Ibsenism" (The Nottingham Evening Post), dealing with "Ibsenite propaganda" (The Scotsman), and the "Ibsen craze", or even "Ibsenity or Ibsenility" (The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent)[31]. Parodies of Ibsen were not limited to the theatre, as *Punch* produced a large number of Ibsen-themed cartoons and articles. These included "Mr Punch's Pocket Ibsen", Ibsen's plays rewritten by "Mr. P's Own Harmless Ibsenite"[32], and a humorous poem entitled "An ABC of Ibsenity"[33]. Being ridiculed by the British press seems to confirm his seamless integration into British literary references, and perhaps also the pertinence of his writing. George Bernard Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891) uses principles from Ibsen's plays to analyse the prejudices and injustices in British society. Henry James was initially unimpressed by Ibsen, and returned an "Ibsenite volume" to Edward Gosse with a letter dismissing Ibsen's

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[29] Gosse, Edmund, *Northern Studies*, London, Walter Scott, 1890, p. 39.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Retrieved from http://www.robertbuchanan.co.uk/html/giftedlady.html
[32] Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13283/13283-h/13283-h.htm
[33] *Ibid.*

plays as "grey mediocrity"[34]. However, he went on to refer to him, with apparent affection, as "Our Northern Henry"[35].

Unlike Gosse's portrayal of Ibsen as a sophisticate at odds with his home environment, the New Woman writer George Egerton presents no contradiction between the stereotypical image of Norway as a land of dramatic landscapes and its potential as a place of modernity. Several of her short stories contain references to well-known Nordic writers, including Ibsen ("Now Spring Has Come"), Bjornson ("The Spell of the White Elf") and Strindberg ("A Cross Line"), and her collection *Keynotes* is dedicated to Knut Hamsun. However, it is these modern figures that make up her Nordic cultural sphere, rather than any references to older literature. In "Now Spring Has Come", the protagonist's curiosity about a modern Norwegian novel summons up images of a glowing sky:

> I was waiting in a shop for some papers I had ordered, when it struck me. I took it up. The author was unknown to me. I opened it at haphazard, and a line caught me. I read on. I was roused by the bookseller's suave voice, "That is a very bad book. Madam. One of the modern realistic school, a tendenz roman, I would not advise Madam to read it."
> A-ah, indeed!
> I laid it down and left the shop. But the words I had read kept dancing before me; I saw them written across the blue of the sky, in the sun streaks on the pavement, and the luminous delicacy of the Norwegian summer nights; they were impressed on my brain in vivid colour, glowing, blushing with ardour as they were. Weeks passed; one afternoon, time hung heavily on my hands, and I sent for the book.[36]

A brief look at the book is enough for its words to merge with her surroundings, and to produce vibrant evocations of Norway in the summer. This illumination through literature is key to Egerton's portrayal of Norway, which combines a romantic personal attachment to the country, several of the stories are semi-autobiographical, with a radical representation of female sexuality and experience.

Norwegian nature is a significant presence in *Keynotes*, and there are many references to its characteristic features. Like the evocation of the midnight sun above, "An Ebb Tide" also refers to the particularity of the

[34] Michael Egan (ed) *Henrik Ibsen*, London, Routledge, p. 216.
[35] Robins, Elizabeth, *Theatre and Friendship: Some Henry James Letters*, Freeport (NY), Books for Libraries Press, 1969, p. 184.
[36] Egerton, George, *Keynotes*, Cambridge (USA), John Wilson and Sons, 1894, p. 47.

"purple light that clothes the Northern heights"[37]. References to winter scenes and landscape features, like fjords and forests, are in line with the image of Norway presented by Dasent and Gosse:

> At dinner hour we passed a fjord, a lovely deep-blue fjord, winding to our right as we passed, with the spire of a church just visible among the fir-trees round the bend.[38]

The Norwegian landscape viewed from the ferry is made up of pleasing features: fjords, forests, and picturesque village churches. However, it is also the source of an intense physical and mental impression for the protagonist of "Now Spring Has Come":

> The fjord was full of lights from the different crafts at anchor, and the heaven full of stars; and the longer one looked up there, the more one saw myriads of flimmering eyes of light, until one's brain seemed full of their brightness, and one forgot one's body in gazing. Long silvery streaks glistened through the heaving water like the flash of feeding trout, and lads and lassies in boats rowed to and fro, and human vibration seemed to thrill from them, filling the atmosphere with man and woman. And the silken air caressed my face as the touch of cool, soft fingers.[39]

The fjord at night produces powerful images and and sensations, and Egerton uses an impressionistic style to render this very Nordic scene. The movement of people rowing produces a general "human vibration", which is intensely physical, and even sexual, but also generates an out of body experience for the protagonist who is "lost in gazing".

The landscapes of the north, and especially the aurora borealis, are an impressive, almost supernatural presence. Walchester notes the "regal" imagery used by Marie Corelli in Thelma, where the sun appears "as Viking king": "Midnight—and the unwearied sun stood, yet visible in the heavens, like a victorious king throned on a dais of royal purple bordered with gold."[40]

This image attests to the rich literary power of both Viking legends and the uniquely impressive landscapes of the North. Egerton also includes supernatural elements in her treatment of northern nature.

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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.
[40] Walchester, Kathryn, *Gamle Norge and Nineteenth-Century British Women Travellers in Norway*, 154.

While her female characters are frequently described as witches[41], in "The Spell of the White Elf", the protagonist leaves Norway "a little sad; there is a witchery about the country that creeps into one and works like a love-philter, and if one has once lived up there, one never gets it out of one's blood again."[42]

The attraction of the country is almost uncanny, but it also creates an intensely physical link. The unique landscapes and simpler lifestyles offer her female characters a greater connection with "the keynote of women's witchcraft", which in "The Cross Line" is described as the "untamable quantity that may be concealed but is never eradicated by culture"[43]. The untamed Norwegian landscape is the ideal setting for her study of the "terra incognita"[44] of women in literature.

Her modern treatment of female relationships also demonstrates a link with Norwegian society. Her "coalition building"[45] between women is rooted in the Nordic setting, for example, in "The Spell of the White Elf" the protagonist meets a woman who "go(es) out and win(s) bread and butter" on the ferry from Norway to England. In "How Marie Larson Exorcised a Demon" the Norwegian maid is an accomplished character whose skill for storytelling overpowers her. These characters seem to hint at women's more "influential position" [46] in society, which was observed by many Victorian travellers, who were astonished by the many practical tasks taken on by women.

It is unnecessary to go into detail about the current perception of Northern Europe as a place which is closer to achieving gender equality, studies such as the Global Gender Gap Report are often cited as proof of this advancement. However, today we associate Scandinavian women's advantages with a more sophisticated social context, while in Egerton's stories simplicity and a link with nature are the setting for her characters'

[41] For example, in *Keynotes* the protagonist of "A Cross Line" is described as a "witch woman" (p. 37), and the male narrator in "A Little Gray Glove" is intrigued by a "gray-clad witch" (p. 110).

[42] Egerton, George, *Keynotes*, p. 81.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] "A Keynote to Keynotes", in T*en Contemporaries: Notes Toward Their Definitive Bibliography*, John Galsworthy (ed), London, Ernest Benn, 1932, p. 58.

[45] Hager, Lisa, "A Community of Women: Women's Agency and Sexuality in George Egerton's Keynotes and Discords", in *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, Issue 2.2 (Summer 2006).

[46] Blundell, Isabelle, cited in Fjågesund and Syme, *The Northern Utopia*, 228.

more independent lifestyles, as well as providing material for stylistic experimentation. This connection exemplifies the ambiguous aspects of the Victorian vision of Scandinavia as a combination of modern social structures and well-established traditions.

Old Norse literature and Viking myths are attractive not only for their imaginative possibilities, but also for their (at times exaggerated) importance in forming both modern and Victorian Britain, British cultural heritage, and the English language. Yet the North remains peripheral; although Britain feels close to Scandinavia, Victorian readers were also attracted to the image of a simpler, older Nordic culture. As Briens points out, the North is often thought of in terms of "extremes", as it is "associé à ce qui est lointain et mal connu, à la frontière entre l'habité et l'inhabité, entre l'hospitalier et l'inhospitalier."[47] It is surely this tension which intrigued Victorian writers, pushing them to study its historical foundations, translate them for British readers, and idealise them through adventure stories. Today, the Nordic countries have a reputation for modernity and progress, and their geographical closeness to Britain makes them a concrete, accessible example in British politics, culture and lifestyles. Both in current media representations and in Victorian writing, the North is imagined as a place of freedom and possibilities, allowing us as readers to project ourselves into the past and the future.

[47] Briens, Sylvain, "Boréalisme. Le nord comme espace discursif", in *Etudes Germaniques*, 71, Paris, Klincksieck, 2016, (forthcoming).